

Testimony before the Human Services Committee
February 23, 2010
Support for SB 140

My name is Vered Brandman and I live in Norwalk. I'm here today because of BridgeHouse and a short but important list of services that I've been able to find and utilize over the last three years since my diagnosis. I have a mental illness, which for me means that I need lots of support, guidance, community, and the occasional professional clinical help.

I don't want to make anyone question the value, the benefits, of professional help, but I do want to make very clear that for me, and for many other young adults that I've run into through the mental health and rehabilitation system, the biggest contributor to maintaining progress and staying out of hospitals and Intensive Out Patient Programs is community providers. Community providers have allowed me to receive services and supports I've needed to become a successful young adult. I urge you to support SB 140, An Act Concerning Youth Transitioning between the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. This bill would require DCF to provide the services that have helped me so much to young adults with mental illnesses who are transitioning from DCF to DMHAS, regardless of how old they are.

Community services like BridgeHouse, like Young Adult Peer Support, that are based on membership and active participation of those members are important in getting me from where I started—a shell-shocked Intensive Outpatient Program “graduate”—to where I want to be: a full-time college student, living independently, working towards a career that is meaningful. Being in the hospital may have stabilized the chemical imbalance that causes my symptoms, and going to an Intensive Out-Patient Program may have given me an opportunity to work through the trauma that threw me over the edge, but it was by working with other consumers of mental health services that I've been able to grow hopeful. If I hadn't grown hopeful, I would not be back at work now, I would not have plans to go back to school, and I wouldn't be here today, in front of all of you legislators, advocating for what I, and many others, need in order to be better-functioning members of our communities.

I know that I am lucky to have built up my supports and services the way I have since my first hospitalization and diagnosis; most of the young adults I've met in the system are not as proactive as I have been, are not as driven as I am, are not as fortunate as I have been when trying to put together their support systems and supportive services. I went into the mental health system on my own, as a nineteen year old college drop-out, and I am twenty two now and have a schedule just as busy and just as meaningful as I had when I was a full-time student, before my breakdown. I've had help along the way, but not everyone in my position has had that help—not everyone with a mental illness has had the supportive provider-consumer relationships that I have had, which have enabled me to reach out and find what I need in order to transition into the adult world. It's been hard for me, but I can only imagine how much harder it has been, and still is, for other young adults who are transitioning into the adult system. Many fall into homelessness because they can't access resources that would keep them living off the streets, and incarceration for crimes that they commit while suffering from symptoms that could have been treated, or at least managed, with the right resources to support them.

Young adults like me need help to transition into all the responsibilities and daily habits of adulthood; things like paying rent, driving a car or taking the bus, getting an education, a career, and building independent living skills. I'm glad I've gotten as far as I have, but I don't want to wake up ten or twenty years from now and realize that I am in the same place as I am today. I know I can move forward, I just need help to get through this transitional stage so that I can be the best-functioning adult I can be. Please support SB 140 to ensure that my peers—transitioning youth and young adults— have opportunities to succeed as adults.